

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A device for locking an object to a tree,  
comprising:

an eyebolt having a threaded shaft and a  
head that defines an open eye;

a protective bracket having a central  
housing and at least one bracket arm that extends from  
said central housing, wherein said central housing  
receives said eye of said eyebolt therein, and wherein  
said central housing defines a hole that is aligned  
with said eye of said eyebolt;

a lock having an elongated body that extends  
into said hole and through said eye of said eyebolt,  
thereby interlocking said protective bracket to said  
eyebolt.

2. The device according to Claim 1, wherein said lock  
has a first open configuration and a second locked  
configuration where said lock is set in a fixed  
position within said central housing when in said  
locked configuration, wherein said lock is selectively  
converted between said open configuration and said  
locked configuration with a key.

3. The device according to Claim 1, wherein said protective bracket has two bracket arms that extend from opposite sides of said central housing.

4. The device according to Claim 1, wherein said central housing envelops said head of said eyebolt and prevents access to said eyebolt when locked to said head of said eyebolt.

5. A method of attaching a locking device to a tree, comprising the steps of:

advancing an eyebolt into a tree, wherein said eyebolt has a head that defines an open eye;

placing a protective bracket over said eyebolt, wherein said protective bracket defines a hole that aligns with said open eye of said eyebolt;

advancing a lock through said eye of said eyebolt, therein locking said protective bracket to said eyebolt.

6. The method according to Claim 5, wherein said step of advancing an eyebolt into a tree includes connecting said protective bracket to said eyebolt and

rotating said protective bracket to screw said eyebolt into a tree.

7. The method according to Claim 5, wherein said step of placing a protective bracket over said eyebolt envelops said eyebolt between said protective bracket and the tree, thereby isolating said head of said eyebolt.

8. A method of locking a tree stand to a tree to prevent theft, said method comprising the steps of:

advancing an eyebolt into a tree, wherein said eyebolt has a head that defines an open eye;  
attaching a tree stand to the tree proximate said eyebolt;

placing a protective bracket over said eyebolt, said protective bracket having at least one bracket arm that passes over a section of said tree stand, wherein said protective bracket defines a hole that aligns with said open eye of said eyebolt;

advancing a lock through said eye of said eyebolt, therein locking said eyebolt to said protective bracket.

9. The method according to Claim 8, wherein said tree stand has two framing elements that abut a tree and said step of attaching a tree stand to the tree proximate said eyebolt includes advancing said eyebolt into the tree between said framing elements.

10. The method according to Claim 9, wherein said protective bracket has two bracket arms and said step of placing a protective bracket over said eyebolt includes passing said bracket arms around said framing elements of said tree stand.

11. The method according to Claim 8, wherein said step of advancing an eyebolt into a tree includes connecting said protective bracket to said eyebolt and rotating said protective bracket to screw said eyebolt into a tree.

12. The method according to Claim 11, wherein said step of placing a protective bracket over said eyebolt envelops said eyebolt between said protective bracket and the tree, thereby isolating said head of said eyebolt.